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Reading Reflections

UbD/DI Chp 1

Chapter 1 in the UbD/DI book was a little difficult for me to get through. I felt that for the beginning part of the chapter it was trying to tell me that I could not make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich with only peanut butter or just jelly. I felt I understood the concept of using both Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction equally but the reiteration was unneeded. Under Axiom 2, there is a discussion of working with school specialists to pinpoint materials and information that would be helpful to the varying reading levels. This would obviously depend on the resources a school has to offer, but including other staff in the education of students seems like a great idea to incorporate into my future lessons. Axiom 3 brought up a great idea on what material to focus on to deal with differing levels of student learning. The book discusses the idea that slower learners should prioritize the core and essential information in a unit while advanced learners need challenges on critical parts of the learning material. Dr. Hardy uses a similar pattern in his teaching that I have witnessed. He would occasionally preface a piece of information saying it will not be asked on the test. This allows for students who are struggling to focus on other topics while advanced students can incorporate more detail into their work. Axiom 6 seems like an interesting and effective way to freshen ideas for lecture and student materials. Working with other teachers and learning their different ways of teaching would only benefit my own effectiveness with teaching differing levels of student skill and ability.

UbD/DI Chp 2

Chapter 2’s critical point is the pattern of teaching both high and low level students in the same classroom. The teacher should not teach to the individual but group similar student needs together and tackle them as a collective. I think the section on teaching to the high end interesting. I feel like that strategy is a form of trickledown economics for education. By explaining what is expected and setting the bar high, the teacher can work with students to build themselves up to that level while challenging the high performing students. This section also talks about encouraging optional group work in the classroom. I agree that students given the option of working with partners or alone can incorporate some of the diversity of learning styles. However, I am worried that students would take advantage of the system and use their partner for free answers. One section talks about six different areas that teachers should attend to in order to foster student success. For me personally, learning profiles and student backgrounds would be harder for me to incorporate or need the most work. Though the responsibility for teachers to understand and look out for trouble in student’s backgrounds has been explained, it borders closely on invasion of privacy for me.

UbD/DI Chp 3

Chapter three in the UbD/DI focuses on backwards planning and its effectiveness in flexible teaching. Backwards planning stresses goal centered development and allows for variances in activities or lecture depending on the students’ needs. It sounds like the backwards planning is a more reliable plan to have when stuck on how to teach a subject or class. The chapter also focused on how subjects in the classroom should not be too broad or narrow but connect to multiple (related) areas of focus. This would help my choosing of topics to cover in a class (after looking at state/school requirements). Topics like the Indus River valley might not be ideal topics due to the small amount of information and relatable details. Instead I would look at topics like the Romans that could be linked to several other topics and provide an in-depth discussion in the class. One part of the chapter I felt was really interesting is the second sin of planning and teaching. Even as a student I would think it would be awesome if I could cover every topic in the textbook, but that is unrealistic to condense for one year’s worth of material. This chapter impacted my planning by looking at the topics I have to deal with and picking the most efficient and comprehensive topics. The backwards planning itself provides a systematic approach with flexibility for needs or unforeseen problems. In my own opinion planning activities after evidence is effective because the evidence is not dependent on the activity. If the activity does not work out or is not understood, you can still explain the evidence rather than scrapping the whole plan.

UbD/DI Chp 4

Chapter four expanded on chapter three’s idea of flexibility in the classroom. Most of the chapter talked about dealing with differentiated classrooms and being able to teach to each student. One key part of the chapter I found interesting was the discussion of how every subject has a “kindergarten version” and a “Ph.D. version.” This is an interesting perspective on teaching that would encourage adapting the classroom material to the students you have in a particular class. The book obviously does not want to say dumb a class down or smarten it up each year, but keep the material at a challenging (but not overly so) level. The chapter brings up the critical point of having students comfortable with each other and the teacher. It reminds me of what my geography teacher said about the beginning of class. If you speak at least once in the classroom out loud, you will be more comfortable speaking in discussion throughout the year. A comfortable student is more likely to share his thoughts and ideas with the class and by extension would probably improve academically and socially. One of the discussions in the chapter talks about the futility in having every student complete the same tasks with the same materials and time constraints. At no point in my education have I ever had a test where everyone in the class completed the text at the same time. In addition until I started college (and even after that), many of the students would place requests about time extensions or changes to what was being tested or the way we were being tested.

UbD/DI Chapter 5

Chapter five discussed the different ways to properly assess both the students’ and the teacher’s learning and understanding. The key component the chapter was trying to bring across is that multiple sources of information are required to assess a students learning. A written test is only one possible source and provides a “snap shot” of the student’s understanding. The book wants assessment that uses multiple sources like demonstrations, projects, portfolios and observation to provide a “photo album.” This photo album would provide a more accurate understanding of a student’s ability and skill. The book differentiates drills and authentic work. Drills help reinforce basic skills into the students. Authentic work allows for students to put their skills to the test on real world issues. Both are necessary to help students meet the goals stated in the class. When tailoring assessment it is critical that the work is not overly complex. UbD/DI explains that asking students to do a PowerPoint is ineffective if a multiple choice exam would provide the same information.

Because this chapter puts emphasis on choosing a broad range of assessment, I am trying to think of different ways of getting my portfolio. I know that when I was growing up, many of the stories I heard about college involved one big test and that is the only grade I will get (and a few classes now that is true). However, for the most part my classes have included presentations or other alternative assignments. For my future classroom I intend to use the definition the book has for drills and authentic work and build a class assignment around the framework.